

## Applying Advocacy Skills in Tumultuous Times: Adaptive Capacity of Insuring America's Children Grantees

*This brief documents the lessons that have emerged from the work of the Insuring America's Children grantees, with a focus on how state-based advocates responded and adapted effectively to the unprecedented changes seen in the children's coverage policy landscape over the past several years.*

**M**ore low-income children have health insurance coverage today than at any point in the nation's history, a remarkable achievement that has taken place despite a severe economic downturn, continued erosion of employer sponsored insurance, and increasingly polarized state and federal political environments. This achievement is largely the result of states throughout the country drawing on federal incentives to simplify enrollment and to expand eligibility for coverage through the two major public insurance programs for children, Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

With the goal of securing health care for all children, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation established a multiyear grant-making strategy in 2007, Insuring America's Children. Through competitive investments in advocacy organizations across more than a dozen states that have potential to show significant coverage gains, Insuring America's Children seeks to build and expand momentum for insuring all children not only among the grantee states but nationally as well. Working closely with Spitfire Strategies and the

Center for Children and Families at the Georgetown University Health Policy Institute (CCF), the advocates supported by Insuring America's Children have strengthened their strategic communications and policy capacity to expand children's coverage, serving as models for advocates throughout the country that are working towards the goal of insuring all children and a variety of health care and other policy goals.

The work of the Insuring America's Children grantees and other child health advocates throughout the country has coincided with a decline of nearly one million uninsured children in the U.S., a remarkable accomplishment even without the economic and political upheaval faced by many states. As the goal of ensuring that all children have health coverage becomes increasingly attainable, understanding the work of successful state-based advocates can provide lessons for ongoing and future efforts to expand children's coverage and continually improve children's access to high quality health care.

**A Snapshot of Key Findings:** Advocates successfully adapted their strategic partnerships as the economic and political contexts in their states shifted, assuming new and often expanded leadership roles within state-based coalitions and forging new or expanded partnerships with non-traditional groups, such as the business community. Grantees also strengthened their reach and influence by serving as critical sources of information and for timely and reliable analysis—of enrollment trends, proposed policy options, provisions of new laws, and federal program incentives—to state policymakers and other key stakeholders. Guided by their assessment of opportunities in the shifting environment and supported by Spitfire and CCF, grantees carried out both public and behind-the-scenes campaigns in support of near-term goals and with a constant eye toward the ultimate goal of insuring all children. In doing so, they focused on consistent, positive messages to successfully break through the mire of a gloomy economy and sometimes combative political atmosphere in states. Throughout this process, advocates benefited from the technical assistance, support, and state peer-to-peer learning available through the project and with the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's support.